

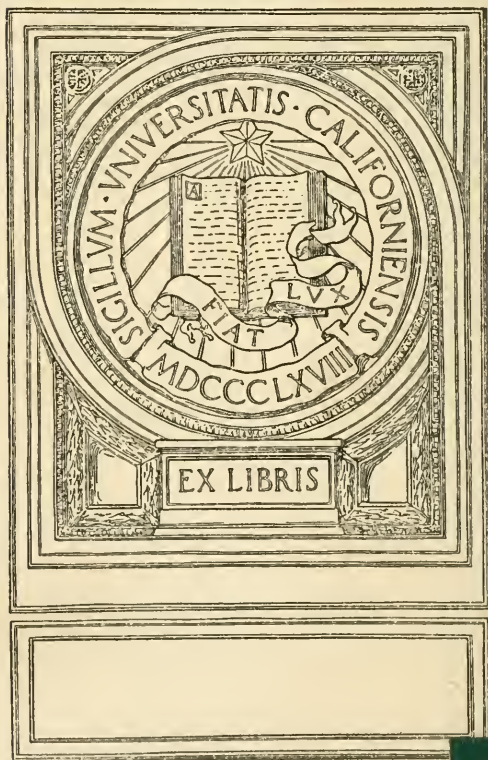
THE GUARDS
CAME THROUGH

AND OTHER POEMS

By
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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THE GUARDS
CAME THROUGH

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

THE GUARDS CAME THROUGH AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

AUTHOR OF "SONGS OF ACTION," "SONGS
OF THE ROAD," ETC.



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PREFACE

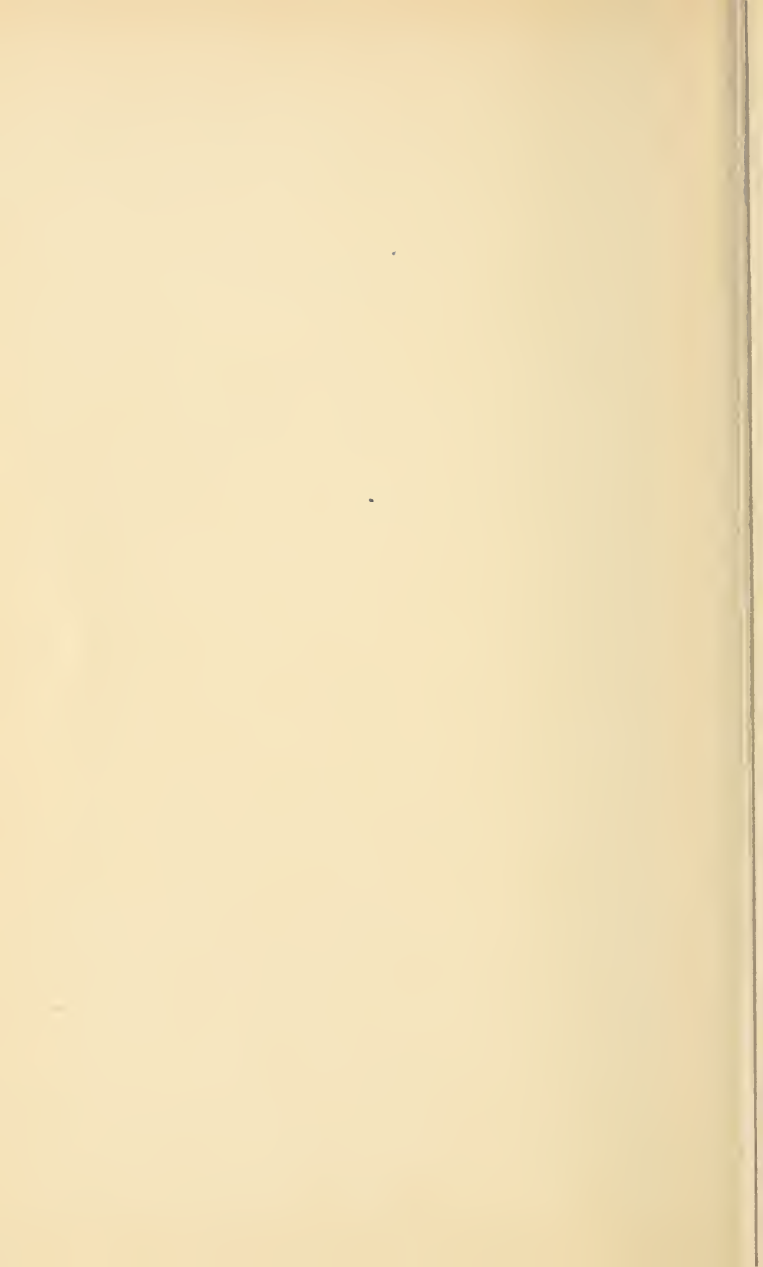
I must apologize for the size of this booklet, which can only be justified on the ground that there is some demand for the contents as recitations. I hope presently to combine whatever is worth preserving in my three volumes of verse, so as to make a single collection.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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THE GUARDS
CAME THROUGH



VICTRIX

How was it then with England?

Her faith was true to her plighted word,
Her strong hand closed on her blunted sword,
Her heart rose high to the foeman's hate,
She walked with God on the hills of Fate—
And all was well with England.

How was it then with England?

Her soul was wrung with loss and pain,
Her face was grey with her heart's blood drain,
But her falcon eyes were hard and bright,
Austere and cold as an ice-cave's light—

And all was well with England.

How was it then with England?

Little she said to foe or friend,

True, heart true, to the utmost end,
Her passion cry was the scathe she wrought,
In flame and steel she voiced her thought—
And all was well with England.

How was it then with England?

With drooping sword and bended head,
She turned apart and mourned her dead,
Sad sky above, sad earth beneath,
She walked with God in the Vale of Death—
Ah, woe the day for England!

How is it now with England?

She sees upon her mist-girt path
Dim drifting shapes of fear and wrath,
Hold high the heart! Bend low the knee!
She has been guided, and will be—
And all is well with England.

THOSE OTHERS

WHERE are those others?—the men who stood
In the first wild spate of the German flood,
And paid full price with their heart's best blood

For the saving of you and me:
French's Contemptibles, haggard and lean,
Allenby's lads of the cavalry screen,
Gunnners who fell in Battery L,
And Guardsmen of Landrecies?

Where are those others who fought and fell,
Outmanned, outgunned and scant of shell,
On the deadly curve of the Ypres hell,
Barring the coast to the last?

Where are our laddies who died out there,
From Poeleapelle to Festubert,

When the days grew short and the poplars bare
In the cold November blast?

For us their toil and for us their pain,
The sordid ditch in the sodden plain,
The Flemish fog and the driving rain,
The cold that cramped and froze;
The weary night, the chill bleak day,
When earth was dark and sky was grey,
And the ragged weeds in the dripping clay
Were all God's world to those.

Where are those others in this glad time,
When the standards wave and the joybells chime,
And London stands with outstretched hands
Waving her children in?

Athwart our joy still comes the thought
Of the dear dead boys, whose lives have bought
All that sweet victory has brought
To us who lived to win.

To each his dreams, and mine to me,
But as the shadows fall I see
That ever-glorious company—
The men who bide out there.
Rifleman, Highlander, Fusilier,
Airman and Sapper and Grenadier,
With flaunting banner and wave and cheer,
They flow through the darkening air.

And yours are there, and so are mine,
Rank upon rank and line on line,
With smiling lips and eyes that shine,
And bearing proud and high.
Past they go with their measured tread,
These are the victors, these—the dead!
Ah, sink the knee and bare the head
As the hallowed host goes by!

THE GUARDS CAME THROUGH

MEN of the Twenty-first,

Up by the Chalk Pit Wood,

Weak from our wounds and our thirst,

Wanting our sleep and our food,

After a day and a night.

God! shall I ever forget?

Beaten and broke in the fight,

But sticking it, sticking it yet,

Trying to hold the line,

Fainting and spent and done;

Always the thud and the whine,

Always the yell of the Hun.

Northumberland, Lancaster, York,

Durham and Somerset,

Fighting alone, worn to the bone,
But sticking it, sticking it yet.

Never a message of hope,
Never a word of cheer,
Fronting "Hill 70's" shell-swept slope,
With the dull, dead plain in our rear;
Always the shriek of the shell,
Always the roar of its burst,
Always the tortures of Hell,
As waiting and wincing we cursed
Our luck, the guns, and the Boche.

When our Corporal shouted "Stand to!"
And I hear some one cry, "Clear the front for the
Guards"—

And the Guards came through.

Our throats they were parched and hot,
But, Lord! if you'd heard the cheer,

Irish, Welsh and Scot,

Coldstream 'and Grenadier—

Two Brigades, if you please,

Dressing as straight as a hem.

We, we were down on our knees,

Praying for us and for them.

Praying with tear-wet cheek,

Praying with outstretched hand.

Lord! I could speak for a week,

But how could you understand?

How could your cheeks be wet?

Such feelin's don't come to you;

But how can me, or my mates forget

How the Guards came through?

“Five yards left extend,”

It passed from rank to rank,

And line after line, with never a bend,

And a touch of the London swank.

A trifle of swank and dash,
Cool as a home parade,
Twinkle, glitter and flash,
Flinching never a shade,
With the shrapnel right in their face,
Doing their Hyde Park stunt,
Swinging along at an easy pace,
Arms at the trail, eyes front.
Man! it was great to see!
Man! it was great to do!
It's a cot, and a hospital ward for me,
But I'll tell them in Blighty wherever I be,
How the Guards came through.

HAIG IS MOVING

AUGUST, 1918

HAIG is moving!

Three plain words are all that matter,
Mid the gossip and the chatter,
Hopes in speeches, fears in papers,
Pessimistic froth and vapours—

Haig is moving!

Haig is moving!

We can turn from German scheming,
From humanitarian dreaming,
From assertions, contradictions,
Twisted facts and solemn fictions—

Haig is moving!

Haig is moving!

All the weary idle phrases,
Empty blamings, empty praises,
Here's an end to their recital,
There is only one thing vital—

Haig is moving!

Haig is moving!

He is moving, he is gaining,
And the whole hushed world is straining,
Straining, yearning, for the vision
Of the doom and the decision—

Haig is moving!

THE GUNS IN SUSSEX

LIGHT green of grass and richer green of bush

Slope upwards to the darkest green of fir.

How still! How deathly still! And yet the hush

Shivers and trembles with some subtle stir,

Some far-off throbbing like a muffled drum,

Beaten in broken rhythm oversea,

To play the last funereal march of some

Who die to-day that Europe may be free.

The deep-blue heaven, curving from the green,

Spans with its shimmering arch the flowery

zone!

In all God's earth there is no gentler scene,

And yet I hear that awesome monotone.

Above the circling midge's piping shrill,
And the long droning of the questing bee,
Above all sultry summer sounds, it still
Mutters its ceaseless menaces to me.

And as I listen, all the garden fair
Darkens to plains of misery and death,
And looking past the roses, I see there
Those sordid furrows, with the rising breath
Of all things foul and black. My heart is hot
Within me as I view it, and I cry,
"Better the misery of these men's lot
Than all the peace that comes to such as I!"

And strange that in the pauses of the sound
I hear the children's laughter as they roam,
And then their mother calls, and all around
Rise up the gentle murmurs of a home.
But still I gaze afar, and at the sight
My whole soul softens to its heart-felt prayer,

“Spirit of Justice, Thou for whom they fight,

Ah, turn in mercy to our lads out there!

“The froward peoples have deserved Thy wrath,

And on them is the Judgment as of old,

But if they wandered from the hallowed path,

Yet is their retribution manifold.

Behold all Europe writhing on the rack,

The sins of fathers grinding down the sons!

How long, O Lord?” He sends no answer back,

But still I hear the mutter of the guns.

YPRES

SEPTEMBER, 1915

PUSH on, my Lord of Württemberg, across the
Flemish Fen!

See where the lure of Ypres calls you!

There's just one ragged British line of Plumer's
weary men;

It's true they held you off before, but venture it
again!

Come, try your luck, whatever fate befalls
you!

You've been some little time, my Lord.

Perhaps you scarce remember

The far-off early days of that resistance.

Was it in October last? Or was it in November?

And now the leaves are turning and you stand
in mid-September

Still staring at the Belfry in the distance.

Can you recall the fateful day—a day of drift-
ing skies,

When you started on the famous Calais onset?
Can it be the War-Lord blundered when he urged
the enterprise?

For surely it's a weary while since first before
your eyes

That old Belfry rose against the sunset.

You held council at your quarters when the bud-
ding Alexanders

And the Pickel-haubed Cæsars gave their rea-
sons.

Was there one amongst that bristle-headed circle
of commanders

Ever ventured the opinion that a little town of
Flanders

Would hold you pounded here through all the
seasons!

You all clasped hands upon it. You would break
the British line,

You would smash a road to westward with your
host,

The howitzers should thunder and the Uhlan
lances shine,

Till Calais heard the blaring of the distant
"Wacht am Rhein,"

As you topped the grassy uplands of the coast.

Said the Graf von Feuer-Essen, "It's a fact be-
yond discussion,

That man to man we can outfight the foe.

There is valour in the French, there is patience
in the Russian,

But blend all war-like virtues and you get the
lordly Prussian,"

And the bristle-headed murmured, "*Das ist
so.*"

"And the British," quoth another, "they are mer-
cenary cattle,

Without one noble impulse of the soul,
Degenerate and drunken; if the dollars clink and
rattle,

'Tis the only sort of music that will call them to
the battle."

And all the bristle-headed cried, "*Ja wohl!*"

And so next day your battle rolled across the
Menin Plain,

Where Capper's men stood lonely to your
wrath.

You broke him, and you broke him, but you broke
him all in vain,

For he and his contemptibles kept closing up
again,

And the khaki bar was still across your path.

And on the day when Gheluvelt lay smoking in
the sun,

When Von Deimling stormed so hotly in the
van,

You smiled as Haig reeled backwards and you
thought him on the run,

But, alas for dreams that vanish, for before the
day was done

It was you, my Lord of Würtemberg, that ran.

A dreary day was that—but another came, more
dreary,

When the Guard from Arras led your fierce
attacks,

Spruce and splendid in the morning were the
Potsdam Grenadiere,

But not so spruce that evening when they staggered spent and weary,

With those cursed British storming at their backs.

You knew—your spies had told you—that the ranks were scant and thin,

That the guns were short of shell and very few,

By all Bernhardt's maxims you were surely bound to win,

There's the open town before you. Haste, my Lord, and enter in,

Or the War-Lord may have telegrams for you.

Then came the rainy winter, when the price was ever dearer,

Every time you neared the prize of which you dreamed,

Each day the Belfry faced you but you never
brought it nearer,

Each night you saw it clearly, but you never saw
it clearer.

Ah, what a weary time it must have seemed!

At last there came the Easter when you loosed the
coward gases,

Surely you have got the rascals now!

You could see them spent and choking as you
watched them thro' your glasses,

Yes, they choke, but never waver, and again the
moment passes,

Without one leaf of laurel for your brow.

Then at Hooge you had them helpless, for their
guns were one to ten,

And you blasted trench and traverse at your
will.

You had them dead and buried, but they still
sprang up again.

“*Donnerwetter!*” cried your Lordship, “*Donner-*
wetter!” cried your men,

For their very ghosts were guarding Ypres still.

Active, Guards, Reserve—men of every corps and
name

That the bugles of the War-Lord muster in.

Each in turn you tried them, but the story was
the same;

Play it how you would, my Lord, you never won
the game,

No, never in a twelvemonth did you win.

A year, my Lord of Würtemberg—a year, or
nearly so,

Since first you faced the British *vis-à-vis!*

Your learned Commandanten are the men who
ought to know,

But to ordinary mortals it would seem a trifle
slow,

If you really mean to travel to the sea.

If you cannot *straf* the British, since they *strafen*
you so well,

You can safely smash the town that lies so
near,

So it's down with arch and buttress, down with
belfry and with bell,

And it's *hoch* the seven-seven that can drop the
petrol shell

On the shrines that pious hands have loved to
rear!

Fair Ypres was a relic of the soul of other days,

A poet's dream, a wanderer's delight,

We will keep it as a symbol of your brute Teu-
tonic ways,

That millions yet unborn may come and curse you
as they gaze

At this token of your impotence and spite.

For shame, my Lord of Würtemberg! Across
the Flemish Fen

See where the little army calls you.

It's just the old familiar line of fifty thousand
men,

They've beat you once or twice, my Lord, but ven-
ture it again,

Come, try your luck, whatever fate befalls you.

GROUSING

"The army swore terribly in Flanders."—
UNCLE TOBY.

WHAT do the soldiers say?

"Dam! Dam! Dam!

I don't mind cold, I don't mind heat,
Over the top for a Sunday treat,
With Fritz I'll always take my spell,
But I like my grub, and where in hell
Is the jam?"

What does the officer say?

"Dam! Dam! Dam!

Mud and misery, flies and stench,
Piggin' it here in a beastly trench,
But what I mean, by Jove, you see,

I like my men and they don't mind me,
So, on the whole, I'd rather be
Where I am."

What does the enemy say?

"Colossal Verdam!

They told me, when the war began,
The British Tommy always ran;
And so he does, just as they said,
But, '*Donnerwetter*'! it's straight ahead,
Like a ram."

What does the public say?

"Dam! Dam! Dam!

They tax me here, they tax me there,
Bread is dear and the cupboard bare,
I'm bound to grouse, but if it's the way
To win the war, why then I'll pay
Like a lamb."

THE VOLUNTEER

(1914—1919)

THE dreams are passed and gone, old man,
That came to you and me,
Of a six days' stunt on an east coast front,
And the Hun with his back to the sea.

Lord, how we worked, and swotted sore,
To be fit when the day should come!
Four years, my lad, and five months more,
Since first we followed the drum.

Though "Follow the drum" is a bit too grand,
For we ran to no such frills;
It was just the whistles of Nature's band
That heartened us up the hills.

That and the toot of the corporal's flute,
Until he could blow no more,
And the lilt of "Sussex by the Sea,"
The marching song of the corps.

Those hills! My word, you would soon get fit,
Be you ever so stale and slack,
If you pad it with rifle and marching kit
To Rotherfield Hill and back!

Drills in hall, and drills outdoors,
And drills of every type,
Till we wore our boots with forming fours,
And our coats with "Shoulder hipe!"

No glory ours, no swank, no pay,
One dull eventless grind;
Find yourself, and nothing a day
Were the terms that the old boys signed.

Just drill and march and drill again,
And swot at the old parade,
But they got two hundred thousand men.
Not bad for the old brigade!

A good two hundred thousand came,
On the chance of that east coast fight;
They may have been old and stiff and lame,
But, by George, their hearts were right!

Discipline! My! "Eyes right!" they cried,
As we passed the drill hall door,
And left it at that—so we marched cock-eyed
From three to half-past four.

And solid! Why, after a real wet bout
In a hole in the Flanders mud,
It would puzzle the Boche to fetch us out,
For we couldn't get out if we would!

Some think we could have stood war's test,

Some say that we could not,

But a chap can only do his best,

And offer all he's got.

Fall out, the guard! The old home guard!

Pile arms! Right turn! Dismiss!

No grousing, even if it's hard

To break our ranks like this.

We can't show much in the way of fun

For four and a half years gone;

If we'd had our chance—just one! just one!—

Carry on, old Sport, carry on!

THE NIGHT PATROL

SEPTEMBER, 1918

BEHIND me on the darkened pier

They crowd and chatter, man and maid.

A coon-song gently strikes the ear,

A flapper giggles in the shade.

There where the in-terned lantern gleams,

It shines on khaki and on brass;

Across its yellow slanting beams

The arm-locked lovers slowly pass.

Out in the darkness one far light

Throbs like a pulse, and fades away.

Some signal on the guarded Wight,

From Helen's Point to Bembridge Bay.

An eastern wind blows chill and raw,

Cheerless and black the waters lie,

And as I gaze athwart the haze,

I see the night patrol go by.

Creeping shadows blur the gloom,

Thicken and darken, pass and fade;

Again and yet again they loom,

One ruby spark above each shade—

Twelve ships in all! They glide so near,

One hears the wave the fore-foot curled,

And yet to those upon the pier

They seem some other sterner world.

The coon-song whimpers to a wail,

The treble laughter sinks and dies,

The lovers cluster on the rail,

With whispered words and straining eyes.

One hush of awe, and then once more

The vision fades for them and me,

And there is laughter on the shore,

And silent duty on the sea.

THE WRECK ON LOCH McGARRY

IF you should search all Scotland round,
The mainland, skerries, and the islands,
A grimmer spot could not be found
Than Loch McGarry in the Highlands.

Pent in by frowning mountains high,
It stretches silent as the tomb,
Turbid and thick its waters lie,
No eye can pierce their yellow gloom.

'Twas here that on a summer day
Four tourists hired a crazy wherry.
No warning voices bade them stay,
As they pushed out on Loch McGarry.

McFarlane, Chairman of the Board,
A grim hard-fisted son of lucre,
His thoughts were ever on his hoard,
And life a money-game, like Euchre.

Bob Ainslie, late of London Town,
A spruce young butterfly of fashion,
A wrinkle in his dressing-gown
Would rouse an apoplectic passion.

John Waters, John the self-absorbed,
With thoughts for ever inward bent,
Complacent, self-contained, self-orbed,
Wrapped in eternal self-content.

Lastly coquettish Mrs. Wild,
Chattering, rowdy, empty-headed;
At sight of her the whole world smiled,
Except the wretch whom she had wedded.

Such were the four who sailed that day,
To the Highlands each a stranger;
Sunlit and calm the wide loch lay,
With not a hint of coming danger.

Drifting they watched the heather hue,
The waters and the cliffs that bound **them**;
The air was still, the sky was blue,
Deceitful peace lay all around them.

McFarlane pondered on the stocks,
John Waters on his own perfection,
Bob Ainslie's thoughts were on his socks,
And Mrs. Wild's on her complexion.

When sudden—oh, that dreadful scream!
That cry from panic fear begotten!
The boat is gaping in each seam,
The worn-out planks are old and rotten.

With two small oars they work and strain,
A long mile from the nearer shore
They cease—their efforts are in vain;
She's sinking fast, and all is o'er.

The yellow water, thick as pap,
Is crawling, crawling to the thwarts;
And as they mark its upward lap,
So fear goes crawling up their hearts.

Slowly, slowly, thick as pap,
The creeping yellow waters rise,
Like drowning mice within a trap,
They stare around with frantic eyes.

Ah, how clearly they could see
Every sin and shame and error!
How they vowed that saints they'd be,
If delivered from this terror!

How they squirmed and how they squealed!

How they shouted for assistance!

How they fruitlessly appealed

To the shepherds in the distance!

How they sobbed and how they moaned,

As the waters kept encroaching!

How they wept and stormed and groaned,

As they saw their fate approaching!

And they vowed each good resolve

Should be permanent as granite,

Never, never, to dissolve,

Firm and lasting like our planet.

See them sit, aghast and shrinking!

Surely it could not be true!

“Oh, have mercy! Oh, we’re sinking!

Oh, good Lord, what *shall* we do!”

Ah, it's coming! Now she founders!

See the crazy wherry reel!

Downward to the rocks she flounders,

Just one foot beneath her keel!

In the shallow, turbid water

Lay the saving reef below.

Oh, the waste of high emotion!

Oh, the useless fear and woe!

Late that day four sopping tourists

To their quarters made their way,

And the brushes of Futurists

Scarce could paint their disarray.

And with half-amused compassion

They were viewed from the hotel,

From the pulp-clad beau of fashion,

To the saturated belle.

But a change was in their features,
And that change has come to tarry,
For they all are altered creatures
Since the wreck of Loch McGarry.

Now McFarlane never utters
Any talk of bills or bullion,
But continually mutters
Texas from Cyril or Tertullian.

As to Ainslie he's not caring
How the new-cut collar lies,
And has been detected wearing
Dinner-jackets with white ties.

Waters, who had never thought
In his life of others' needs,
Has most generously bought
A nursing-home for invalids.

And the lady—ah, the lady!

She has turned from paths of sin,
And her husband's face so shady
Now is brightened by a grin.

So misfortunes of to-day
Are the blessings of to-morrow,
And the wisest cannot say
What is joy and what is sorrow.

If your soul is arable
You can start this seed within it,
And my tiny parable
May just help you to begin it.

THE BIGOT

THE foolish Roman fondly thought
That gods must be the same to all,
Each alien idol might be brought
Within their broad Pantheon Hall.
The vision of a jealous Jove
Was far above their feeble ken;
They had no Lord who gave them love,
But scowled upon all other men.

But in our dispensation bright,
What noble progress have we made!
We know that we are in the light,
And outer races in the shade.
Our kindly creed ensures us this—
That Turk and infidel and Jew

Are safely banished from the bliss

That's guaranteed to me and you.

The Roman mother understood

That, if the babe upon her breast

Untimely died, the gods were good,

And the child's welfare manifest.

With tender guides the soul would go,

And there, in some Elysian bower,

The tiny bud plucked here below

Would ripen to the perfect flower.

Poor simpleton! Our faith makes plain

That if no blest baptismal word

Has cleared the babe, it bears the stain

Which faithless Adam had incurred.

How philosophical an aim!

How wise and well-conceived a plan!

Which holds the new-born babe to blame,

For all the sins of early man.

Nay, speak not of its tender grace,

But hearken to our dogma wise:

Guilt lies behind that dimpled face,

And sin looks out from gentle eyes.

Quick, quick, the water and the bowl!

Quick with the words that lift the load!

Oh, hasten, ere that tiny soul

Shall pay the debt old Adam owed!

The Roman thought the souls that erred

Would linger in some nether gloom,

But somewhere, sometime, would be spared

To find some peace beyond the tomb.

In those dark halls, enshadowed, vast,

They flitted ever, sad and thin,

Mourning the unforgotten past

Until they shed the taint of sin.

And Pluto brooded over all

Within that land of night and fear,

Enthroned in some dark Judgment Hall,

A god himself, reserved, austere.

How thin and colourless and tame!

Compare our nobler scheme with it,

The howling souls, the leaping flame,

And all the tortures of the pit.

Foolish half-hearted Roman hell!

To us is left the higher thought

Of that eternal torture cell

Whereto the sinner shall be brought.

Out with the thought that God could share

Our weak relenting pity sense,

Or ever condescend to spare

The wretch who gave Him just offence!

'Tis just ten thousand years ago

Since the vile sinner left his clay,

And yet no pity can he know,

And as he lies in hell to-day

So when ten thousand years have run

Still shall he lie in endless night.

O God of Love! O Holy One!

Have we not read Thy ways aright?

The godly man in heaven shall dwell,

And live in joy before the throne,

Though somewhere down in nether hell

His wife or children writhe and groan.

From his bright Empyrean height

He sees the reek from that abyss—

What Pagan ever dreamed a sight

So holy and sublime as this?

Poor foolish folk! Had they begun

To weigh the myths that they professed,

One hour of reason and each one

Would surely stand a fraud confessed.

Pretending to believe each deed

Of Theseus or of Hercules,

With fairy tales of Ganymede,
And gods of rocks and gods of trees!

No, no, had they our purer light
They would have learned some saner tale
Of Balaam's ass, or Samson's might,
Or prophet Jonah and his whale,
Of talking serpents and their ways,
Through which our foolish parents strayed,
And how there passed three nights and days
Before the sun or moon was made.

.
O Bigotry, you crowning sin!

All evil that a man can do
Has earthly bounds, nor can begin
To match the mischief done by you—
You, who would force the source of love
To play your small sectarian part,
And mould the mercy from above
To fit your own contracted heart.

THE ATHABASCA TRAIL

My life is gliding downwards; it speeds swifter
to the day

When it shoots the last dark cañon to the Plains
of Far-away,

But while its stream is running through the years
that are to be,

The mighty voice of Canada will ever call to
me.

I shall hear the roar of rivers where the rapids
foam and tear,

I shall smell the virgin upland with its balsam-
laden air,

And shall dream that I am riding down the wind-
ing woody vale,

With the packer and the packhorse on the Atha-
basca Trail.

I have passed the warden cities at the Eastern
water-gate

Where the hero and the martyr laid the corner
stone of State,

The habitant, *coureur-des-bois*, and hardy voy-
ageur—

Where lives a breed more strong at need to ven-
ture or endure?

I have seen the gorge of Erie where the roaring
waters run,

I have crossed the Inland Ocean, lying golden in
the sun,

But the last and best and sweetest is the ride by
hill and dale,

With the packer and the packhorse on the Atha-
basca Trail.

I'll dream again of fields of grain that stretch
from sky to sky

And the little prairie hamlets where the cars go
roaring by,

Wooden hamlets as I saw them—noble cities still
to be,

To girdle stately Canada with gems from sea to
sea.

Mother of a mighty manhood, land of glamour
and of hope,

From the eastward sea-swept islands to the sunny
western slope,

Ever more my heart is with you, ever more till
life shall fail

I'll be out with pack and packer on the Athabasca
Trail.

RAGTIME!

[“During the catastrophe the band of the Titanic played negro melodies and ragtime until the last moment, when they broke into a hymn.”—
DAILY PAPER.]

RAGTIME! Ragtime! Keep it going still!
Let them hear the ragtime! Play it with a will!
Women in the lifeboats, men upon the wreck,
Take heart to hear the ragtime lilting down the
deck.

Ragtime! Ragtime! Yet another tune!
Now the “Darkey Dandy,” now “The Yellow
Coon!”

Brace against the bulwarks if the stand’s askew,
Find your footing as you can, but keep the music
true!

There's glowing hell beneath us where the shattered
boilers roar,

The ship is listing and awash! the boats will hold
no more!

There's nothing more that you can do, and nothing
you can mend,

Only keep the ragtime playing to the end.

Don't forget the time, boys! Eyes upon the
score!

Never heed the wavelets sobbing down the floor!
Play it as you played it when with eager feet
A hundred pair of dancers were stamping to the
beat.

Stamping to the ragtime down the lamp-lit deck,
With shine of glossy linen and with gleam of
snowy neck,

They've other thoughts to think to-night, and
other things to do,

But the tinkle of the ragtime may help to see them
through.

Shut off, shut off the ragtime! The lights are
falling low!

The deck is buckling under us! She's sinking by
the bow!

One hymn of hope from dying hands on dying
ears to fall—

Gently the music fades away—and so, God rest
us all!

CHRISTMAS IN WARTIME

1916

CHEER oh, comrades, we can bide the blast
And face the gloom until it shall grow lighter.
What though one Christmas should be overcast,
If duty done makes all the others brighter.

1917

THE LAST LAP

We seldom were quick off the mark,
And sprinting was never our game;
But when it's insistence and hold-for-the-distance,
We've never been beat at that same.

The first lap was all to the Hun,
At the second we still saw his back;

But we knew how to wait and to spurt down the
straight,

Till we left him dead-beat on the track.

He's a bluffer for all he is worth,

But he's winded and done to the core,

So the last lap is here, with the tape very near,

And the old colours well to the fore.

Not merry! No—the words would grate,

With gaps at every table-side,

But chastened, thankful, calm, sedate,

Be your victorious Christmas-tide.

LINDISFAIRE

HORSES go down the dingy lane,
But never a horse comes up again.
The greasy yard where the red hides lie
Marks the place where the horses die.

Wheat was sinking year by year,
I bought things cheap, I sold them dear;
Rent was heavy and taxes high,
And a weary-hearted man was I.

In Lindisfaire I walked my grounds,
I hadn't the heart to ride to hounds;
And as I walked in black despair,
I saw my old bay hunter there.

He tried to nuzzle against my cheek,
He looked the grief he could not speak;
But no caress came back again,
For harder times make harder men.

My thoughts were set on stable rent,
On money saved and money spent,
On weekly bills for forage lost,
And all the old bay hunter cost.

For though a flier in the past,
His days of service long were past,
His gait was stiff, his eyes were dim,
And I could find no use for him.

I turned away with heart of gloom,
And sent for Will, my father's groom,
The old, old groom, whose worn-out face
Was like the fortune of our race.

I gave my order sharp and hard,
"Go, ride him to the knacker's yard;
He'll fetch two pounds, it may be three;
Sell him, and bring the price to me."

I saw the old groom wince away,
He looked the thoughts he dared not say;
Then from his fob he slowly drew
A leather pouch of faded hue.

"Master," said he, "my means are small,
This purse of leather holds them all;
But I have neither kith nor kin,
I'll pay your price for Prince's skin.

"My brother rents the Nether Farm,
And he will hold him safe from harm
In the great field where he may graze,
And see the finish of his days."

With dimming eyes I saw him stand,
Two pounds were in his shaking hand;
I gave a curse to drown the sob,
And thrust the purse within his fob.

“May God do this and more to me
If we should ever part, we three,
Master and horse and faithful friend,
We’ll share together to the end!”

You’ll think I’m playing it on you,
I give my word the thing is true;
I hadn’t hardly made the vow,
Before I heard a view-halloo.

And, looking round, whom should I see,
But Bookie Johnson hailing me;
Johnson, the man who bilked the folks
When Ethelrida won the Oaks.

He drew a wad from out his vest,
"Here are a thousand of the best;
Luck's turned a bit with me of late,
And, as you see, I'm getting straight."

That's all. My luck was turning too;
If you have nothing else to do,
Run down some day to Lindisfaire,
You'll find the old bay hunter there.

A PARABLE

HIGH-BROW HOUSE was furnished well

With many a goblet fair;

So when they brought the Holy Grail,

There was never a space to spare.

Simple Cottage was clear and clean,

With room to store at will;

So there they laid the Holy Grail,

And there you'll find it still.

FATE

I KNOW not how I know

And yet I know.

I do not plan to go,

And yet I go.

There is some dim force propelling,

Gently guiding and compelling,

And a faint voice ever telling

“This is so.”

The path is rough and black—

Dark as night—

And there lies a fairer track

In the light.

Yet I may not shirk or shrink,

For I feel the hands that link

As they guide me on the brink
Of the Height.

Bigots blame me in their wrath.
Let them blame!

Praise or blame, the fated path
Is the same.

If I droop upon my mission,
There is still that saving vision,
Iridescent and Elysian,
Tipped in flame.

It was granted me to stand
By my dead.
I have felt the vanished hand
On my head
On my brow the vanished lips,
And I know that Death's eclipse
Is a floating veil that slips,
Or is shed.

When I heard thy well-known voice,

Son of mine,

Should I silently rejoice,

Or incline

To strike harder as a fighter,

That the heavy might be lighter,

And the gloomy might be brighter

At the sign?

Great Guide, I ask you still,

“Wherefore I?”

But if it be thy will

That I try,

Trace my pathway among men,

Show me how to strike, and when,

Take me to the fight—and then,

Oh, be nigh!

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